



ASSOCIATION **Representing the interests of Barbican Residents**

The City's Lighting strategy

Response from the Barbican Association

The Barbican Association represents the 4000 or so residents of the Barbican Estate, the largest single cluster of residences in the City and also an icon of 20th Century urban planning (grade II and II* listed).

1. Light bothers Barbican residents a lot

- The Barbican is surrounded by brightly lit office blocks, whose lighting stays on all night. Nearly all flats see these on their immediate skyline, but for many these buildings are just across the street, providing near daylight lighting conditions 24 hours a day.
- The problem has got worse. Refurbished and new offices around us have installed new LED lighting, which is much brighter and cheaper than the old lighting. There are also more and bigger office buildings immediately surrounding the estate.
- The lighting is on all the time and badly controlled (not switched off at night, on weekends and bank holidays or obscured by blinds in the case of 24 hour working)
- The City Pollution team claim they can do nothing about light pollution unless there is direct glare from a light shining into a home - though we think they could if they approached the problem of light nuisance more robustly. There is some government guidance on light pollution that the City has not adopted
- The Culture Mile has plans for light displays and projected public information on the Barbican surfaces (see Look and Feel Strategy). We think they are an inappropriate way to treat the external surfaces of the Barbican. We support understated, subtle lighting of architectural features, done sparingly
- The Culture Mile is also proposing lighting the gardens in Beech Gardens. While clearly there needs to be a level of light for public safety, the contrast between the gardens – which are restful pools of darkness in the evening – and the brightly lit City beyond is pleasing to residents, and we fear further intrusion of light into our home environments. Moreover, the Barbican gardens are home to an ecosystem of plants animals and birds (including bats). Overlighting will affect them and damage their habitats.
- The Culture Mile has designs on the lighting inside the Estate on the Podium. Yet the lighting was carefully designed by the original architects to highlight architectural features and not

create light pollution. It is also subject to volume 4 of the Barbican Listed Management Guidelines. We worry that there are some slap happy ideas about whacky lighting floating around the Culture Mile project that are not consonant with some of the careful thinking that has gone into this strategy.

2 Therefore we welcome this lighting strategy

Indeed, there is much to applaud in the strategy. If implemented the streets and open spaces of the City would become much pleasanter environments and hopefully safer too.

We support the following points in particular (with those in bold given particular support) in the introduction on the approach and key opportunities

- *Controlling the balance of light and shade including retaining natural darkness to some areas.*
- *Balancing the social and economic benefits of light with the environmental consequences.*
- ***Reducing light spill, intrusive lighting and light pollution, particularly adjacent to residential properties***
- ***Providing better environmental control of the lighting will assist in reducing adverse impacts on local ecologies***
- ***Embedding lighting within the planning system will help improve design and control aesthetic outcomes***
- *Taking a more holistic approach to lighting will assist with communications between all stakeholders.*

Below we outline other recommendations of the strategy that we support and would like to see emphasised.

3. But we are disappointed by the strategy's references to the Barbican

The Barbican Estate presents a particular challenge: it has the importance of a "historic monument/building" which deserves, as the strategy says, some special lighting. But – unlike the Tower of London and St Paul's Cathedral, and the Guildhall – it is also a place where people live, and one of the City's largest areas of greenery and biodiversity, and as such deserves protection from light pollution and protection of dark areas.

We think that the lighting design designed by the original architects manages this challenge well. The gardens are dark, the walk ways are illuminated sensitively under the parapets, and lighting on the podium highlights columns and structural features in a way that does not force glare or light intrusion into people's homes.

We are not averse to creative and sensitive new suggestions for upgrading the Barbican's lighting, but we aren't given confidence by the following suggestion in the section in this strategy on the Culture

Mile. If the Barbican's lighting had been examined, we think that the strategy would not have come up with the following two aims – because they are contradictory:
[Culture Mile (4.0 p 58)]

“• Introduce a playful lighting approach which assists in connecting the various cultural institutions in the area, most notably, the Barbican.”

• Celebrate the rich historic and iconic architecture of the area by introducing lighting which is sensitive to the original design intent.”

The Barbican's architecture is many things, but it is not “playful”

“• Low level lighting to seating areas after dark to create intimate ambience and encourage activity after dark”.

Please see the earlier comments on the importance of keeping some areas of darkness and discouraging activity – for residential peace and for ecological diversity.

In the section on Character places, the Barbican is lost within the Culture Mile. In terms of lighting we think the strategy should recognise that in the middle of the Culture Mile is the biggest concentration of residential buildings in the City, which in terms of lighting needs has more in common with Golden Lane to the north (rather unfortunately left out of any character areas, though it is also a fine piece of 20th urban planning) than with Smithfield in the Culture Mile. The lighting strategy itself says that lighting to residential areas should be looked at separately from that for the overall City. We very much hope that will apply to the Barbican estate, despite it sitting within the Culture Mile.

As the area is residential it needs to be quiet in evenings and night times and to some extent protected from the “vast amount of visitors” that the Culture Mile expects to attract.

4.0 p 62 shows some illumination on the façade above Beech Street. This might be acceptable, as it is a limited area and has a specific relationship to Beech Street, but residents oppose the idea that any available Barbican façade should be washed with light or public information (which is the impression given by the Culture Mile strategy).

Rather we support the approach taken in this strategy where the Barbican is referred to as a boundary/edge (appendix X p 87). The strategy suggests illuminating openings but leaving the boundaries themselves dark, We agree with that idea.

4. What we like

With the caveats above, we welcome many of the key recommendations. In particular we welcome

Section 4.1.4 – Sustainability

And its recognition of the social and environmental effects of good lighting design.

We particularly support:

“Observing good practice with respect to limiting obtrusive light will help minimise light trespass and nuisance. Retaining and protecting natural darkness in landscaped areas such as parks, gardens, churchyards and by the river will also help protect local Ecologies [We consider the Barbican gardens such an environment]. Adverse impacts on bio-diversity can also be avoided through specific measures such as limiting the amount of up-lighting to trees, particularly where there are nesting birds, observing the presence of bat corridors and following recognised guidance such as DEFRA’s Statutory Nuisance from Insects and Artificial Light. A ‘dark night’ might be considered where lighting to key landmarks is turned off.”

We approve the consequent Recommendations

- *Improve the quality of light in residential areas.*
- *Reduce light spill and light trespass local to hotels and residence.*
- *Reduce over-lighting through consideration of the lit context.*
- *Consider a ‘dark night’ turning off non-essential lighting to help save energy.*
- *Consider the impact of artificial light on well-being.*
- *Reduce levels of illumination either through design or the use of smart lighting controls.*
- *Provide good practice guidelines to building owners and users including contractors.*
- *Employ high quality luminaires with good optical control.*
- *Ensure that any upward light is directed at vertical surfaces rather than into the sky.*
- *Consider retaining natural darkness as is appropriate in environmental sensitive areas.*
- *Employ best practice guidance with respect to limiting impacts on bio-diversity.*

On 4.1.5 Culture, please note our observations above that the Barbican is both a significant set of buildings and a residential estate. The simple guidance proposed needs to take account of this dual nature.

We support the following recommendations:

- *Avoid over-lighting, floodlighting and the inappropriate use of colour.*
- *Manage timings of lighting schemes through the City-wide smart lighting control system.*

On 4.1.6 Planning we support lighting being embedded in the planning system and the proposal for a set of planning guidelines on light for developers

On 4.1.7 Management, we support this section. One of the Barbican Association’s constant refrains in response to consultations is that ongoing management and maintenance of any service or initiative is almost more important than the initial project itself. As residents, many of us have lived in the City for many years – and we want the City to concentrate on doing things well and sustaining them by high standards of maintenance and management.

We welcome the emphasis on improved communication with stakeholders, including residents, and the Barbican Association would be pleased to engage in such consultations.

Finally, we support the strategy’s recommendation that “Lighting to residential areas should be looked at as separate to the overall City.” We would particularly welcome being consulted about the streets immediately adjacent to the Barbican Estate and of the Highwalks and garden spaces – in relation to lighting levels, peak and off peak times. And we note with approval the strategy’s comment: “Please note estate lighting should follow residents’ consultation and advice regarding listed building consent.”

We urge the City to let this statement be the guiding principle in relation to the Barbican estate and not let the estate be subsumed under and overall Culture Mile view.

5. Specific suggestions and points of detail

When office buildings on the edge of the estate have recently been built taller and closer to their neighbours, it has been left to resident groups to negotiate with developers on issues such as fitting of blinds. There are planning rules for lighting but experience shows us that these systems are soon over-ridden by the occupiers, thus making regimes about the use of blinds an important factor in alleviating light pollution. The fitting of blinds should be a strict planning condition together with a regime for them being closed by 9pm.

We understand the need for 24 hour working in some offices, but we also witness many floors of completely empty over-lit offices overnight, through the weekends and even on Christmas Day. Why not have, or at least work towards, a rule that all lights to shops and offices are switched off at night as they have in other European cities?

We would support a strong and innovative approach to reducing light pollution, working strategically with the Mayor of London rather than use the lack of a London wide strategy as an excuse. We hope this strategy marks an intent on the part of the City to take a robust approach – and perhaps lead a London wide approach.

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